

# Unearthing the Buried City

## *The Janet Translation Project*

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This document is part of *Unearthing the Buried City: The Janet Translation Project*, a series of AI-assisted English translations of Pierre Janet's works.

In his seminal 1970 book: *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, Henri Ellenberger wrote:

*Thus, Janet's work can be compared to a vast city buried beneath ashes, like Pompeii. The fate of any buried city is uncertain. It may remain buried forever. It may remain concealed while being plundered by marauders. But it may also perhaps be unearthed some day and brought back to life (p. 409).*

This project takes Ellenberger's metaphor seriously — and literally. The goal of this work is to unearth the buried city of Janet's writings and make them accessible to the English-speaking world, where much of his legacy remains obscured or misunderstood.

Pierre Janet was a pioneer of dynamic psychology, psychopathology, hypnosis, and dissociation. His influence on Freud, Jung, and the broader psychotherapeutic tradition is profound, yet the bulk of his original writings remain untranslated or scattered in partial form. These AI-assisted translations aim to fill that gap — provisionally — by making Janet's works readable and searchable in English for the first time.

This is not an academic translation, nor does it claim to replace one. It is a faithful, literal rendering produced with the aid of AI language tools such as Chat GPT and DeepL and lightly edited for clarity. Its purpose is preservation, accessibility, and revival. By bringing these texts to light, I hope to:

- Preserve Janet's contributions in a readable English form
- Spark renewed interest among scholars, clinicians, and students
- Inspire human translators to produce definitive, academically rigorous editions

# On a New Apparatus Designed for the Experimental Study of Kinesthetic Sensations<sup>1</sup>

Pierre Janet

The devices that can be of some service in experimental psychology research are not numerous, and this is why it seems interesting to us to present to the readers of the *Revue philosophique* a new instrument constructed by Mr. J. B. Charcot, hospital intern.<sup>2</sup> It is a device intended to precisely provoke in experimental subjects the muscular or kinesthetic sensations, and in particular the kinesthetic sensations of writing.

It is known that, in a large number of circumstances, it is very important to be able to provoke such sensations in the mind of the subjects. First of all, of course, when it is a matter of studying the muscular sense itself in an objective manner, it is not enough to ask the subject to make movements themselves and to tell us what they feel. These *active* movements are very complex phenomena, and the feeling that results from them must not be confused with the kinesthetic sensation itself; it is necessary, while the subject turns their head or closes their eyes, to themselves impress on their limbs *passive* movements as precise and as clearly defined as possible. In certain cases, when it is a matter of studying a paretic state of a limb, it is not enough to note the existence of muscular sensations; it would still be necessary to be able to measure them; it would be necessary to be able to say whether the patient distinguishes as well on the paretic side as on the healthy side the passive movements that are impressed upon their limb. Finally, there is a very particular case in which the provocation of kinesthetic sensations, and in particular those of writing, takes on exceptional importance: it is in the *study of verbal blindness*. Professor Charcot has shown, in fact, in his early studies on aphasia, a curious characteristic of this condition: "these patients, incapable of reading a word, rather easily deciphered the meaning of the words they had to read by reproducing with their hand the movements necessary to write the word."<sup>3</sup> In short, they are still capable of reading through the kinesthetic sense, when they can no longer read through the visual sense. To study this phenomenon, one usually limited oneself to having the patients copy the words, either just below the model, or by tracing directly over the lines themselves. But this procedure, as noted by M. J. B. Charcot, is incorrect, because it allows sight to intervene and we do not know exactly what its role is in this phenomenon. In all these different cases and in many others, it was useful to be able to provoke kinesthetic sensations in the subjects in a precise manner.

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<sup>1</sup> Janet, Pierre. "Sur un nouvel appareil destiné à l'étude expérimentale des sensations kinesthésiques," *Revue Philosophique*, xxxiv (1892), II, pp. 506-509.

<sup>2</sup> This device was presented by its author, Mr. J. B. Charcot, to the Société de biologie (session of June 11, 1892), under the title: "Sur un procédé destiné à évoquer les images motrices graphiques chez les sujets atteints de cécité verbale" This work was published in *Le Progrès médical*, June 18, 1892, p. 478.

<sup>3</sup> Ballet, *Langage intérieur*, 1886, p. 113.

What means were available to achieve this result? Very rudimentary and imprecise procedures were used. For example, one would simply have the subject turn their head and move their arm in various ways while asking whether they felt the movement applied and in what new position the limb was now located. When a bit more precision was desired, the subject was asked to keep their eyes closed and to touch with their free hand the arm that had been moved, or better still, they were asked to exactly reproduce with the left arm the movements that had been applied to the right arm.

Mr. Beaunis, in a work on the memory of kinesthetic sensations, made a contribution to this study.<sup>4</sup> The author had applied his method to studies of subjective psychology; he performed the movements himself and judged his own sensations. I have often made use of Mr. Beaunis's method, and to greater effect, but by applying it in an objective manner. A pencil is placed in the subject's hand, then, while they turn their head, the hand is guided in such a way as to draw on paper a line of determined length, two points separated from one another by a few centimeters, or an angle of known aperture. This done, without allowing the subject to look, they are asked to repeat and to reproduce by themselves an equal line, two points separated by the same distance, or an angle of the same degree. The two drawings are compared, and one can, in certain cases, draw from them some indications regarding the subject's kinesthetic sensation. This method, which has many advantages, nonetheless presents one flaw, which is that it is difficult to move a person's hand in this way. "The movements conveyed are general movements of the wrist; and not those very delicate movements of the fingers through which we are able to write." Moreover, the fundamental sensation of passive displacement is mixed with contact and pressure sensations, which are useless and even detrimental.

It is to remedy these various inconveniences that Mr. J. B. Charcot constructed a small device that is very simple and very ingenious. "It consists essentially of a wooden rod about 50 centimeters long, about as thick as an ordinary pencil, shaped at the lower end and pierced at its upper end, over a length of 30 centimeters, with holes spaced 3 to 5 centimeters apart. Depending on the length of the rod one wishes to use (a length which will determine the amplitude of the movements imparted to the subject's hand), a metal axle is passed through one of these holes, located at the center of a Cardan suspension, thus allowing inclinations that are varied and in all directions. The suspension itself is fixed on two vertical uprights 18 centimeters high. These uprights are placed on a small table 20 centimeters high; they are spaced from one another by about 15 centimeters. Parallel to the line running through the base of the uprights and about 15 centimeters in front of them, a slot 5 centimeters wide is cut into the table; it is through this slot that the lower end of the rod-pencil passes. The tip of the latter will rest on a wooden slanted surface of adjustable inclination...

The patient is seated comfortably, the right forearm resting on the small experiment table, the hand passed between the two uprights, holding the rod-pencil in the position usually adopted for writing, exactly as if its tip ended at the level of the small table and it were necessary to write on it. The observer, seated

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<sup>4</sup> Beaunis, Communication to the *Société de psychologie physiologique*. (*Revue philosophique*, 1888, I, 568).

on a chair lower than that of the patient, passes their arm under the small table and moves the tip of the rod-pencil over a writing model fixed to the slanted surface.”<sup>5</sup>

Thanks to this device, in a word, the observer communicates precisely to the subject’s hand and fingers all the movements necessary to write a word, and this without touching them, solely through a wooden rod that the subject holds like a pencil. Depending on the nature of the experiments, the subject will be asked whether they understood the word being written, or one will seek to determine whether they can reproduce that same word through voluntary or involuntary movements of the hand; finally, the word written by the patient will be compared with the letters that were traced and which will remain as a precise graphic record of the movements communicated to the subject’s hand.

Mr. J. B. Charcot, after having constructed this device, began some of these studies. He examined how normal subjects taken from different classes of individuals recognize, through the muscular sense, the letters that are made to be written by their hand, and he made some interesting observations on this subject. He also applied this method to the study of patients affected by verbal blindness, replicating with greater precision a well-known experiment. These studies, which are only just beginning, may provide some useful insights into the kinesthetic sense, which is still so poorly understood.

Finally, to show that this device can have highly varied uses, I will recall that I myself used it during my first lecture at the Salpêtrière, to strikingly reproduce before the audience some experiments on hysterical anesthesia.<sup>6</sup> A completely anesthetic hysterical patient on the right side held the pencil that I was moving without her knowledge. She declared that she had felt absolutely nothing and was unable to say the word that I had written. Yet the hand, left to itself, reproduced exactly the same word with the same shapes of letters. Mr. J. B. Charcot’s device made it possible to give greater clarity to this small experiment on subconscious muscular sensation.

These few examples show that this very simple little device has already proven useful and can be so again. It deserves to have its place among the instruments of experimental psychology.

Pierre Janet

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<sup>5</sup> *Progrès médical*, June 18, 1892, p. 478.

<sup>6</sup> Lecture of March 11, 1892. (*Archives de neurologie*, 1892, p. 323).